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ABSTRACT

"Child care" is a phrase which has become inextricably linked with the political, economic, and social policies of Australian society. Antagonists and protagonists of child care have put forth arguments against and for child care, respectively, over the past two decades. Supporters of child care have variously viewed child care as a needs-based welfare service, as an integral part of a systemic approach to family support, and as a children's service. The government has attempted to support child care by providing fee relief subsidies to users of commercial child care. As a result, users of commercial child care are entitled to more fee relief than users of community-based centers, and fees have increased in the private sector. Attempts have been made to address issues of award restructuring, accreditation of services and personnel, and work-related child care. Policies that have involved recognition of prior learning and reorganization of existing courses into modules have sought to address problems in the training of child care workers. A further important but complicating factor in attempts to improve the education of child care workers is the need to rationalize the two opposing viewpoints of child care as a profession and as an industry. Contains 26 references. (MM)

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CHILD CARE - WHO NEEDS IT?

SPRC National Social Policy Conference
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3-5 July, 1991

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CHILD CARE : WHO NEEDS IT?

"Child care" is a phrase which has become inextricably linked with the political, economic and social policies of this society. It is a phrase which has been much debated, in many spheres and in many contexts, over the past two decades; the 1990's offer an opportunity for the rhetoric to be matched by reality; for politicians, bureaucrats, providers, unions, training institutions and users to work co-operatively to bring about a rationalisation and possibly a reorganisation of child care organisation, implementation and evaluation. In the process, contemporary issues such as award restructuring, accreditation of services and personnel and work-related child care need to be absorbed into existing processes in such a way that they enhance, rather than complicate, the processes already in place. A further important, but complicating factor, is the need to rationalise the two opposing philosophies of the professionalisation of child care workers and the notion of child care as an industry.

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Introduction

The late 1960's and the decade of the 70's have, for the western world, been characterised as a period of great social turmoil; they witnessed the rise of women's liberation, and the notions of the delayed marriage and the career-oriented mother, the rapid spread of fertility control and abortion, the increase in marriages ending in divorce, live-in relationships which were not blessed by marriage vows, and the emergence of the legitimacy of remaining single. These changes in values have been recorded for posterity in many surveys, and do not require listing here, but one trend which should be of interest to you is the change over the decade in the response to the simple question: (Do you agree that) "Whatever career a woman may have, her most important role in life is still that of becoming a mother". Glezer (1983) in McDonald (1990) reports that in the 1971 study, 78% of married women aged less than thirty-five agreed with this statement, whereas in 1981, just a decade later, only 46% of married women in this same category agreed with the statement.

McDonald (1990) has described these changes in social attitudes and behaviours as :

> "a resurgence of the establishment of the individuals' right to autonomy or capacity for self-direction as opposed to the relative suppression of self that is involved in relationships of commitment". (p18)

These acknowledged changes in social and community attitudes were accompanied by economic and political policies, which helped to entrench these attitudes in the community; working conditions were enhanced by changes to industrial relations environments, including equal opportunity and social justice policies; and casual and part-time work opportunities increased, particularly for women and young people. Over 1.5 million new jobs were created between 1983 and 1989, and the most substantial increases have been in areas which were favourable to women, especially in the service sector.

In economic terms, the middle and late 80's witnessed a rise in the gross domestic product, accompanied by a substantial increase in business fixed investment; the recently deregulated banks were able to lend a much higher percentage of the purchase price of a home but the bottom line was a greatly increased interest rate. These political and economic conditions, when combined with the changing social attitudes to "emancipated" women, were major contributing factors in the increase of married women, with dependant children, entering into or remaining in the workforce.

In the ten years from 1980 to 1989, the total labour force grew by 23%, but increased by 40% for married women. (McDonald, 1990). Women, in particular married women, were viewed as the "star performers in the labour market" of the 1980's, (Maas, 1990:p8), with the two largest groups of married and employed

women being in the 25-34 years and 35-44 years age range, the major groups which could be expected to have dependent children. In 1989 they constituted 65% of all employed, married women; in 1988 for instance, 45% of all married women with children under five were in the workforce. (DCSH, 1991(a)). In addition, for women with children aged between 5 and 12 years, 63% were in the workforce, in full or part time employment, in 1989 as compared with 48% in 1983, a very significant increase. (DCSH, 1991(a)).

It does not take a mental giant to make the connection between the number of women in these last two categories and the need for child care. Child care is, or should be, a major issue for workers, employers and governments at all levels; the study by Anstie et al (1988) indicated that it is vital to Australia's economy that parents can maximise their opportunities to work, to earn a salary or a wage, to spend, and to pay tax.

In spite of the statistical evidence produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and other relevant bodies, there are voices in the community who would argue against the concept of outside child care in the 1990's. This is a quote from a paper presented at the Australian Family Association Conference held in Wagga Wagga in July, 1990:

> "Feminist charlatans that have bluffed their way into the most influential positions in every government bureaucracy and every academic department are being paid handsomely by this naive government to put out propaganda like this".
>
> "This report that I have here, called 'Balancing Families and Work', is the latest in a long line of feminist dishonesty, bent on restructuring society to redress what is perceived as the social injustice of the naturally demanding role of being a mother.
>
> "Incredible as it may seem, it presents babies as career path interruptions and purports to investigate 'the effects that these substantial interruptions to labour force participation have on the career structures, job security, employment conditions and financial independence of Australian women'.
>
> "I am filled with dismay because I know that 'maximising women's choices' means minimising children's chances of a good life ...
>
> "Under the guise of the government's benevolence, 250,000 small children each year are going to be evicted from their homes each morning and dumped in long day-care institutions".
>
> (Joseph, 1990: 14-15)

There is more, but I am sure you have the flavour of the paper. We have all developed a collection of "anti-child care" anecdotes over the years; my favourite concerns the failure to include a child care centre in the infrastructure for the new Parliament House in Canberra; the story goes that the Speaker of the House argued against it because "she had brought up her own children as a single parent and didn't see the need for such a place". True or not, it's a good story.

However, for every antagonist about child care, there are protagonists possessing at least equally moral and logical arguments for child care. Edgar (1988) has suggested that the child care debate has to be turned on its head:

> "It's not a burden on the State, it's not 'welfare', it's not 'abdication of parental responsibility', it is an economically productive necessity by which today's families maintain their purchasing power, feed the growth system's need to increase consumer appetites and fuel the economy". (p1)

Edgar continues :

> "Historically, children have always been surrounded by carers other than (or additional to), the mother, but with higher mobility, joint labour force participation by parents and marital disruption, that buffer zone of close and available carers has been eroded. Time is not elastic and we must face the fact that parental/maternal time for child care is less, in a context where substitutes are not naturally present".
>
> (Edgar, 1988:2)

Other writers have endeavoured to express the need for child care in more esoteric terms, Auerbach (1979) suggested that : "the measure of civilisation is its concern for the care of its children", (p xi), and that one of the examples of neglect of a society's children is demonstrated by a "lack of basic care such as maternal-parental support, consistency and continuity of care afforded by parents or well-chosen surrogates". (p xi).

Without becoming too embroiled in the arguments about whether or not child care workers ~~or not child care workers~~ are parent surrogates, Auerbach's message is clear, namely that child care is not a welfare issue, and provision should not - and in fact - must not be perceived as a needs based program. Such an approach reflects a deficit model which identifies users as helpless, or disempowered, or problem-ridden. If child care is a social issue then we must develop a systematic approach to family support, available to all, with child care an integral part of such family support. This is part of a thesis developed by Bronfenbrenner, and quoted in Edgar (1984).

The family is seen as the "crucible of competence" which requires, in order to achieve and maintain competence, three conditions; firstly a co-operative extension

service to create empowering and supportive social networks in local communities; secondly, the establishment of prevailing patterns of work for both men and women which enable them to work part time, to provide child care part time and engage in other "living" activities and thirdly, evidence of a substantial increase in the number of women in positions of decision making and power so that human concerns, rather than male technological forces, can be the dominant themes.

Brennan carried this notion of prosocial child care into the Australian arena when she wrote the preface to a National Child Care Policy as early as 1983:

> "Child care services are among the most effective support services that governments can provide for families. Good quality child care provides social and educational benefits for children and relieves parents of anxiety about their children's well-being while they are at work, studying or participating in community activities. The availability of child care is of fundamental importance in enabling women to take an active and equal part in society".
>
> (Brennan, 1983:1)

Where does that leave those people who are interested in child care as a children's service and who wish to participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of such services? It leaves them with a trilemma; the dilemma of balancing three often competing and contrasting variables; those of availability of services, affordability of services and quality of services. This trilemma is a vicious cycle caused by economic circumstances; let me point out some obvious factors, e.g. quality affects cost, hence it affects affordability, affordability affects quality, availability is often determined by affordability and so the trilemma intensifies. It would appear that the only way in which the trilemma can be broken is by the payment of subsidies by government at any level to parents, centres or business groups in sufficient amounts to ensure that high quality services are both affordable and available.

Carmody (1989), speaking at the Australian Family Research Conference that year, reminded her audience that both the Government and the Opposition have :

> "recently stated that expansion of child care supply to meet the total demand will not come from the public purse. If supply side issues are to be resolved, the public policy challenge will then be set in a framework for a mix of public, commercial and work-based centres which more ably meet demand". (p2)

This is an interesting statement in light of the Commonwealth Government's subsequent decision to provide fee relief subsidies to users of commercial child care and some other previously unfunded centres. According to figures produced by the Community Child Care Association of Victoria (March 1991), users of commercial

child care centres are entitled to more fee relief than users of community-based centres and that the lower the family income the higher the fee discrepancy. Mr. Staples, the relevant Minister, has indicated that any changes which are made to correct this anomaly will not occur before October 1, 1991.

A second major concern resulting from the decision to offer fee relief to users of the private sector is the admitted increase in fees in many of these centres and the federal government's perceived lack of interest in responding to this action on the part of some proprietors of commercial child care centres, in spite of clear and urgent warnings from many interest groups in the children's services area. In a time when the federal government could be accused of somewhat hasty and poorly considered expansion of fee relief the Department of Community Services and Health has published the first edition of its newsletter about its involvement in child care; the newsletter has the intriguing title of "Minor Matters" and while no one here would be churlish enough to suggest that the title epitomises the government's priorities towards child care, the title is unfortunate at a time of upheaval and general disenchantment with the children's services area.

A number of factors have contributed to this general malaise, including the fiasco over extension of fee relief which I have mentioned. Other destabilising areas include the continued urging by Senator Peter Walsh and others for the introduction of a voucher system, the uncertainty within the child care employment field due to the prolonged award restructuring process, particularly for workers with more than two years training, the debate about the "quasi professionalism" push within the so-called child care "industry", the establishment of a national Industry Training Board and State Industry Training Boards with a charter to determine the supply of child care workers to the field, to monitor the content of courses, including the amount and kind of field work undertaken by students in training and to debate, once more, the notion of generic "care" courses with one specialisation being child care; the concept of national regulations in addition to or in lieu of state and territory regulations for Children's Services; the deliberations relating to the continued role of the Commonwealth in the disbursement of funding for child care services; the list of problems often seems to be endless and almost insurmountable.

The State Training Boards were established with a brief to break down the barriers between industry and education; to ensure that education and training produce people whose skills are needed for a particular industry, rather than people whose skills are narrow and even irrelevant in our rapidly changing world. The award restructuring process, which came into being as a result of the application of the National Wage decision of August 1989, and which heralded a new era in industry training, is based on the principle of structural efficiency and emphasises career paths, retraining and skills upgrading. All these areas are of vital concern to the child care field, with its high percentage of untrained staff, no recognition of three and four year qualifications in salary or role and a high staff burn out rate - 58%

was estimated by a Sydney study in 1988. (Wangmann, 1989). However, in Victoria, the state with which I am most familiar, the Social and Community Services Industry Training Board, which has responsibility for child care, appears to have confined itself to commenting on the TAFE sector of child care training, thereby excluding the higher education institutions from plans relating to the articulation of training programs between the TAFE and the HEI sector.

Obviously one of the major impacts of award restructuring will be the substantially-increased demand for training and retraining at a time when the federal and state governments appear extremely reluctant to increase the funding to TAFE and the higher education sectors. Training authorities have been urged to be "imaginative" and "flexible" in the methods they use to assist untrained personnel to obtain credit for previous learning and/or experience in the field. The "imaginative" and "flexible" options proposed by the SACS Industry Training Board of Victoria, and I imagine, every other ITB, revolve around recognition of prior learning (RPL) and to re-organisation of existing courses into modules. Both of these proposals are inherently positive steps towards meeting the needs of the child care field, but both possess inherently negative aspects for those training personnel in the child care field.

While recognition of prior learning has the potential to ensure that formal education studies are completed in a shorter than normal period of time, there is a need to develop a set of national standards in order to develop some common baseline for learning. It is obvious that if we were confronted with two untrained assistants in a child care centre, both of whom had worked for ten years in the position but one of whom had read widely, talked to qualified staff and observed "appropriate practice", that he-or-she would require different recognition from the other untrained assistant who had spent ten years attending the centre on a daily basis and being "nice to the children", yet both, on paper, would be equal in terms of RPL. One option would be that person A would desire training, whereas person B would be content to remain where he-or-she was.

A further cause for concern to educators is the push for a modular approach to learning, which ensures that once the person's prior learning is established, she-or-he can be given credit for certain modules within a course and therefore need only to complete the remainder of the modules. This process presupposes that the content of each module is self-contained, that all modules are of equal difficulty, do not rely on prior theoretical knowledge or that learning may sometimes need to be integrated across modules. While the TAFE Colleges discuss this the AECA, the Australian Early Childhood Association, has informed the Department of Labour that it supports the concept of modules for teacher education programs. One can only speculate on AECA's source of expertise on such a contentious and radical issue at the higher education level. Deveson (N/D) has suggested that :

> "Educators need to learn to feel comfortable in a more broadly defined and

varied professional setting". (p4)

I would suggest an amendment to that suggestion; namely that educators need to have reason to feel comfortable in a "more broadly defined and varied professional setting". If some of the more obvious professions such as medicine, dentistry, architecture and the law are prepared to accept modular teaching and RPL per se-, I will be most surprised.

This leads me on to a related point, namely child care as part of an industry vis-a-vis its evolution as a profession in the same way that social work and librarianship have moved down this path over the past few decades. The SACS Industry Training Board has argued 1990 (a) that child care is part of an "industry" rather than a "field" or "sector", due to a landmark High Court decision of 1983 which confirmed that "industry" is defined under Section 4 of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act as "any business trade, manufacture, undertaking or calling of employers". (SACS ITB, 1990 (a):p2).

This change in name is supposed, also, to amend the perceptions of the community towards Social and Community Services as no longer having a charitable, philanthropic or religious connotation, that is, a welfare focus, and somehow ensure the recognition of career mobility and flexibility, recognise the importance of training for maintaining quality in service provision and at the same time, acknowledge the importance of the employer-employee relationship.

While no one could argue about the efficacy of such implications, one would hope that the children's services field, which includes child care, does not abandon the slow move towards the professionalisation of the field.

In the meantime, it is to be hoped that members of the child care field, with their colleagues in pre-school centres and programs, continue to advocate for community acknowledgment that the early childhood field occupies a position in society which exemplifies "desirability and status" (Clyde, 1989:39). One way in which this status may be obtained sooner, rather than later, is the implementation of an accreditation process for children's services. The Prime Minister's Policy Launch of March 8, 1990 contained reference to the need to ensure "quality care" through accreditation. Prior to that time, various interest groups, including the ACTU, had become interested in this concept, but it would be fair to say that the matter was not seen as a priority item for the Hawke government. However we were all wrong for it was sufficiently important to include it in his policy speech. With indecent haste a working party was established consisting of trade union representatives, representatives of the private child care sector and relevant other groups. Its brief was to provide the Minister, Mr. Staples, with a report on appropriate options by the end of September of the same year. The working party provided a somewhat inconclusive paper, and when one considers the political, social and economic implications of a voluntary

versus a mandatory system of accreditation it seems obvious why consensus would not be achieved in a very short time.

A further report, by a member of that working party, and commissioned by the Department of Community Services and Health, is due to be made public shortly, and it will be awaited with considerable interest by the entire child care field, no doubt. It could go a long way towards determining whether child care continues to be regarded as an offshoot of the federal government's social justice policy or whether indeed, it has a life of its own.

In the meantime, the federal government admits that even with all the proposed centres built and/or maintained between now and 1995/96, "there will still remain a considerable level of unmet demand for child care". (Staples, 1991:3). About 66% of demand for preschool aged care and 62% of out of school hours care will be accounted for, but what of the rest? As Carmody stated in 1989, there will need to be a "mix of public, commercial and work-based centres". (Carmody, 1989:2). However, in spite of the federal government's positive moves in this area by amending the Taxation legislation to support employer-sponsored child care, there is the need to overcome the odium of being associated with the trade union movement, which is guaranteed to cause fear in the heart of many conservative and business people. However work-based child care can be debated from a basis of knowledge rather than ignorance and that employers, employees and other interested parties will be in a position to rationally discuss the twenty or so existing ways in which employers can offer child care support for employees through providing money, or information, or time or services, rather than operating on the premise that they cannot "do anything" as only six employees need child care and "no one builds a centre for six children".

The community needs to be innovative in order to meet the needs for child care, the bureaucrats need to be innovative and government at all levels need to be innovative in order to meet the needs of parents working outside the home.

At the present moment there are a number of options, ranging in complexity and difficulty, but in sufficient quantity to keep service providers, bureaucrats and researchers busy for a decade or so. They include the following; linking pre-school - kindergartens and a variety of forms of long day care and/or occasional care. In Victoria, for instance, an increasing number of empty or partially used inner city kindergartens bear testimony to the population movements of the last twenty or thirty years. These buildings, in whole or part, could be renovated for use as child care facilities, particularly if combined with the notion of work-related child care. In addition there are primary and secondary schools similarly placed which should be considered as potential child care sites.

Secondly, family day care and centre-based care require some linkages, particularly if

family day caregivers are to remain largely untrained and centres are to continue to employ untrained staff. Family day caregivers, on a rota basis, could act as untrained assistants in both occasional care and long day care centres; each family caregiver would take their children to the same centre on a weekly or fortnightly basis, so providing the children with an opportunity to interact with a larger group of peers and enjoy new learning experiences while the family caregiver receives "on site" inservice.

These suggestions, at first glance, are very mundane and have been tried in many places. However what they could lead to is more important; could it be that the present sessional pre-school will eventually become absorbed into the larger context of child care so that parents who choose permanent part-time care for their four year old, rather than long day care, do not have to take their children to different institutions, or children in the year before school are not "minded" in a child care centre and then transposed to a place of learning - a kindergarten - at set times during the week? Could it be that all the parties involved will, eventually, accept that child care per se is a nurturing, developmentally appropriate growth environment for all children, regardless of their age or stage of development? Could it mean that all people who work in such services could progress through an articulated series of post-secondary and tertiary courses without being diverted into the "kindergarteners train here" and "caregivers train there" syndrome currently in existence?

Before we become too carried away and write to McDonalds to ask them to buy every pre-school - kindergarten in Australia, let me finish with a timely reminder by Blum :

> "There are no easy answers, no quick fixes, no victimless solutions to the problems of child care for working parents. Those who make claims for each answers are deceiving both themselves and the public. They demean child development as well as child care. Theyminimise the role of the family in a civilised society. They overlook the historical fact that in times of transition or stress, it is women and children who have been the first to make the trade-offs and the compromises".
>
> (Blum, 1983:115).

NEWS SHEET

NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMUNITY CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION
183 Brunswick Street • Fitzroy • Victoria • 3065 • (03) 419 1555

MARCH 1991

New Fee Relief System Favours Commercial Sector

In its 1990 election campaign the ALP promised to extend fee relief to users of commercial child care centres. Its justification for this dramatic change in direction was that all users of formal child care - both community based and commercial - were entitled to equitable assistance in meeting the cost of care.

Parents using community based services will understandably ask what the Government means by equity when they learn that users of commercial child care centres received more than they were expecting on January 1, 1991. Not only are they now eligible for fee relief, they are also entitled to more fee relief than users of community based child care centres.

Rather than extend the existing fee relief system to commercial services, the government designed a different system which is administratively easier to deal with. This makes some sense, however what does not makes sense is that this system also offers a higher level of fee relief.

The fee relief system for community based services was altered on October 1, 1990. The fee relief system for commercial services was introduced on January 1, 1991. Many people are wondering why these two fee relief systems differ so much when their respective introductions were separated by only three months.

The chart below demonstrates the extent to which users of community based services are disadvantaged because of the differences in the two fee relief systems.

It is most disturbing to see that the lower the family income the higher the discrepancy between the fee parents pay in a community based service as opposed to a commercial centre.

In a recent meeting with representatives from the National Association of Community Based Children's Services (NACBCS), Mr. Staples, the Minister for Aged, Family and Health Services said that he was aware of the discrepancies between the two fee relief systems and that the Government was keen to remove these discrepancies.

But it was also indicated at that meeting that changes are not likely to take effect until October 1, 1991, after the Federal Budget in August.

So users of community based services can, at best, expect the inequity to continue for several more months.

Community Child Care is currently aware of a number of instances where families using community based services are leaving those services for commercial services due to these fee relief discrepancies. **We are very interested to hear from any other services experiencing similar difficulties.**

COMPARISON OF FEE RELIEF SYSTEMS

	Maximum Weekly Fee.	Number of Children	Hours of Care	A.F.I.	Fee Relief Paid by Government	Fee Paid by Parents	Difference Between Systems
ONE CHILD IN CARE							
Community Based Centre	130	1	Full time 55	370	$81.40	$48.60	$8.14
Commercial Centre	130	1	55	370	$89.54	$40.46	
Community Based Centre	130	1	55	980	$8.20	$121.80	82 cents
Commercial Centre	130	1	55	980	$9.02	$120.98	
TWO CHILDREN IN CARE							
Community Based Centre	130	2	Full time 55	370	$177	$83.00	$17.70
Commercial Centre	130	2	55	370	$194.70	$65.30	
Community Based Centre	130	2	55	1200	$11.00	$249.00	$1.10
Commercial Centre	130	2	55	1200	$12.10	$247.90	

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